DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 328 RC 014 042

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TITLE Educational Pluralism and the Native American Student.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Culture; *American Indian Education; American Indians; *Cultural Differences; *Cultural Pluralism; Definitions; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Government Role; Language Usage; Peer Influence; *Reservation American Indians; Self Concept; Sociocultural Patterns; *Sociolinguistics

ABSTRACT

The report is developed around five priorities which are based on the premise that English as a second language (ESL) students in general, and the reservation bound Indian students specifically, are isolated both educationally and culturally due to conflicts of language and learner based confusion of terms, ideas, and concepts as a result of psycho-social disparity between the tradition based Indian culture and the English-speaking culture. The five priorities include: methodologies that lessen classroom confrontation and support the student; definitions of ESL populations; accurate sociolinguistic descriptions, i.e., how learners view themselves, their peer group, and the values, goals, and motivations of the majority English-speaking group, and how these component parts affect classroom learning; the effects of peer emulation and mediation on language monitoring and performance; and understanding the logic of substandard language usage through an analysis of communicative dysfunctions. The report concludes that subject-area teachers and administrators need to become informed about realistic ESL matter in order to alter and/or adapt curricula and materials; that federal mandates authorizing increased expenditures do not provide answers to all problems; and that research must be initiated in areas pertinent to ESL students and disseminated to the classrooms for implementation or adaptation of curricula and educationally related instruction. (AH)

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REC. MAY 3, 1983

ED230328

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by

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1983

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RC 014042

Educational Pluralism and the Native American Student

Wirt B. Twitchell

INTRODUCTION

Educators working in rural reservation elementary and secondary education have for some time been aware of the unique and perplexing needs of their ESL students. Plagued by a dearth of systematized data, research, and program specific descriptions, these educators frequently have to follow rigid developmental or remedial curricula that do not consider the needs of second-language learners.

Research is needed and materials must be developed to address pertinent learner affective curricula and to serve as denotations for future curricular trends. The Emergency School Aid Act and specifically Public Law 95-561 provides the impetus for addressing the problems of minority group isolation and the improvement of the quality of education for all children. The specific purpose of this title is to provide financial assistance - "to encourage the voluntary elimination, reduction, or prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial proportions of minority group students".

This paper prioritizes the areas of importance and offers support and definitive justification of these priorities. Specific topical areas of research are: (1) methodologies that lessen classroom confrontation and support the student: (2) definitions of ESL populations; (3) accurate sociolinguistic descriptions, i.e. - how learners view themselves, their peer group, and the values, goals, and motivations of the majority English-speaking group, and how these component parts affect classroom learning; (4) the effects of peer

emulation and mediation on language monitoring and performance; and (5) understanding the logic of substandard language usage through an analysis of communicative dysfunctions.

The thrust of the five priorities is based on the premise that ESL students in general and the reservation bound Indian students specifically, are isolated both educationally and culturally due to conflicts of language and learner based confusion of terms, ideas, and concepts as a result of psycho-social disparity between the tradition based Indian culture and the English-speaking culture. Subject-area teachers and administrators need to become informed about realistic ESL matter in order to alter and/or adapt curricula and materials.

TOPICAL ANALYSIS

Educators, administrators, and boards of trustees should be more concerned with developing attitudes and intellectual habits that will guarantee continuing growth toward maturity than identifying the body of information necessary for mastery before awarding some mandated certificate of completion. Education is not, or at least should not, be a reflection of a faculty prioritized curriculum but should provide a climate of inquiry, wonder, curiosity, intellectual honesty, and dedication to the pursuit of truth; thus providing the basis for continuing self development. Toward these ends, the reservation education system, in tune with P.L. 95-561 and the global implications of same, must address pertinent needs in direct fashion and suppress the all too obvious willingness to become involved in tangential curricular inapplicability.

Research in the prioritized areas will serve to identify and specify cognate topics. In line with the list of priorities in the

in the introduction, the following is proffered.

RESEARCH TOPICS

#1 Methodology

Cultural diversity is a source of conflict for the reservation educator. This obstacle is compounded by language related conflicts. In both cases, teacher/student confrontation ultimately results, often to the privation of all concerned. Increased expenditures of federal dollars will not solve this problem but enhanced awareness of the problem might. Monetary infusion is too often viewed as the esponential solution for all ills and self determination is easily redirected to accord compliance with federal fiat. Student support is reason enough for curricular investigation and if it is determined that student needs are not being met or are being ignored, changes should be implemented. Classroom involvement is the byword of effective teaching and should encompass all educational activity, personal and professional.

#2 Definitions

Reservation educators are fortunate in terms of the readily available and often obvious data pertinent to their students. Such is the case in identifying ESL students. However, ESL distinctions perhaps whould be explored in more detail than simply a student's use of second language on a regular basis. Certain lingua franca involve culture specific associations, others relate to sensory experience, and still others relate to cosmic design and devised reality. In order to teach someone, the teacher must understand the learners language perspective and be prepared to deal with associated eccentricities to facilitate learning. ESL needs to connote more than language specific differences, there must be a cultural

investigation relative to ESL principles also and viable conclusions need to be determined and associated solutions addressed.

#3 Descriptions

Sociolinguistic descriptions, accurate learner self-determinations relative to themselves and their important others within the academic environment, and their socio-academic convictions, are of primary import to any educator and/or administrator but are particularly important to reservation school personnel. Student needs are addressed by faculty and sated by curricula. The individuals needs and the combined group needs should be determining factors for all future academic planning and involvement and realistic appraisal of these needs can be related directly to sociolinguistic descriptions. External variables such as peer group coercion or constraint, language related problems, cultural conflict, etc., all notably effect classroom performance, and ways of dealing with these extracurricular incongruities are requisite to the learning process.

#4 Peer Involvement

English language usage among reservation students sometimes promotes feeling of conflict among peers. The ability to speak in a primary native tongue allows the speaker to exercise a certain amount of control over non-native language speakers. The choice to use English or an Indian language rests with the students and the opportunity should exist for these students to utilize either language. A point of contention arises, however, when the use of the Indian language inhibits proper usage of English. A fact inherent to reservation education is the English is a necessary component of useful and meaningful tutelage. The Indian student will be required

to deal with and survive in an English language dominant society and each student must come to grips with this reality and attain closure. This entire process, of necessity, involves a certain amount of stress and this component of reservation education must be realistically addressed and dealt with in some fashion.

#5 Language Usage

Communication, according to Webster's allows the speaker the opportunity to impart or interchange thoughts, opinions, or information by speech. It is the act and process of revealing a part of an individual; his likes and dislikes, feelings, biases, etc. For a person not to be able to communicate is a debilitating state, and considering the fact that communication and understanding are requisite ingredients for survival, lack of communication is ultimately detrimental to mans' existance. Communicative dysfunctions prohibit many students from conveying these thoughts and information to others. To convey inappropriate information in the classroom leaves one open to a broad range of less than comfortable experiences and students suffering from dysfunctions are often times want to bring attention to themselves. Research and involved studies of such manfunctions, both physical and emotional, are widespread but too often the classroom practioner is unaware of the ways and means of dealing with students bound by such handicaps. Practical applications of informal diagnostic and prescriptive techniques should become a part of each teachers instructional pedogogy. Investigation needs to be undertaken to provide these teachers with viable instruments and training to allow for appropriate decision making.

Limited human and institutional resources on the reservation often times make it difficult to develop innovative educational opportunities. These limitations are reinforced by what John M. Giletter in Rural Sociology terms "Passive Rural Consciousness" ("being satisfied with aloofness, paucity of social organizations, dearth of contact and community activities"), but enlightened leadership can overcome these problems and initiate change.

The tasks of implementation and innovation must fall on the shoulders of the reservation administrator if years of tradition bound educational obscurity are to be overcome and the academic phoenix of Indian education is to attain fruition.

RAMIFICATIONS

The Federal Government, Tribal Education department, and the reservation school communities are united in their intent to secure self determined leadership and objectivity in education. Public Law 95-561 will serve to provide the financial inducement but the ultimate responsibility for implementation will fall to the educators and administrators housed in the various schools across the reservations. Students must be adapted to different learning environments early so they will be able to share in the responsibility for increased learning. It seems logical, rational, and educationally sound to anticipate that development of the central self concept, one which incorporates elements of a personal learning style, a sense of self confidence, and a sense of identification of areas of interest will result in an increased acquisition rate for learning. Students must make radical changes in their orientation toward who

they are and the school must serve as the foundation and proctor of these changes.

CONCLUSION

Without question, academic programming in any environment must identify student's needs, offer coursework addressing those needs, and place students in appropriate for and commit themselves to learning. Reservation schools face sociolinguistic obstacles among their ESL students that pose unique and often heretofor neglected problems that effect student learning.

Federal mandates authorizing increased expenditures do not provide answers to these questions. Teachers, administrators, government officials, parents, and students must involve themselves in the identification process and must develop concrete strategies to remedy shortcomings and omissions. Research must be initiated in areas pertinent to ESL students and disseminated to the classrooms for implementation or adaption of curricula and educationally related instrumentation.

Parity is too often used to instill false hope and is bantered about at board meetings to fill agendas. It is time to cast aside idle veriage and begin the process of educating students in ways that are realistic and pragmatic for student utilization. Talk about tightened standards is too often a concern that penalizes rural and ESL students for the inappropriate instruction they receive. Specify and legitimize the curricula in line with self-determined objectives and the results will justify both the means and the ends.